

# U. S. Aids Ranchers' War on Wild Animals

## Stock Raisers of New Mexico Suffer Annual Loss of Millions Through Depredations of Wolves, Coyotes and Mountain Lions

By HARVEY W. PATTON

**P**REDATORY animals, such as wolves, coyotes, mountain lions and bob cats, are costing the stock raisers of New Mexico \$2,000,000 annually through the killing of their stock. This is in spite of the fact that the Federal Government is doing its utmost to exterminate the pests, with the state and stock raisers co-operating. The county authorities were active in the campaign, too, but right now the counties are not helping for two reasons. The first is that the counties in which coyotes are numerous are short of funds and cannot pay the bounty of \$2 for each coyote slain. The other is that when the bottom fell out of the fur market back East coyote pelts dropped from \$12 each to an average of \$1.50 each.

Up to a few months ago many New Mexicans made a business of trapping coyotes for the bounty and the price of the pelt, the pelt being theirs to market as they chose. Now they have all quit, leaving the entire field to the government, the state and what assistance the stock raisers themselves can give in ridding the state of the beasts.

It is authoritatively stated that the individual trappers were not always scrupulously honest in their dealings with the counties previous to the time they stored their traps away. For instance, not so long ago it was only necessary to take the coyote pelts to the county clerk, who would count them and issue a certificate on the county treasurer for payment of the bounty. Some hunters who lived near where the lines of three counties joined had no difficulty in taking the same bunch of pelts to the clerks of the trio of counties and getting a bounty certificate from each. If a hunter had 60 pelts he was entitled to \$120 bounty, but by tricking the three counties, he was able to collect \$360. In addition to this, the pelts were his and he used to get a good price for them. The counties finally discovered the swindle, and now every county in the state has a rule whereby the ears and fur of the head of the coyote must be left attached to the pelt when it is submitted to a county clerk for a bounty certificate. The clerk promptly slits the ears or head, and it is impossible for the hunter to cash in on that particular pelt or pelts in any other county.

Approximately 10,000 coyotes a year are being killed in New Mexico, and it is estimated that there are still 30,000 more roaming around and preying on stock, principally lambs, which indicates that there still is a big job of extermination ahead, with one less agency—the individual hunter—to do the exterminating. Some of the counties now owe hunters as much as \$6,000 with no telling when they will be able to pay. Therefore it is unlikely that these fellows will get back into the game in a hurry, when they cannot collect the bounty due them and with no market for the pelts.

It would be interesting to know what kind of furs the coyote skins are called when they reach the retail stores in the big cities of the East. Some New Mexicans who know all about this hated and cowardly animal confess they do not know what fine name they are given. They must make up in fairly high-priced garments, else a single pelt wouldn't bring \$12 when times were booming, and several pelts are necessary for a garment.

With the bob cat it is different. The fur of this animal is very fine, but it would never do to retail a garment made of its fur as wildcat or bob cat, so the fur is dyed, a fox head is put on it and it is sold as a fox stole.

But getting back to the original discussion. The work of exterminating the beasts is in charge of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the men actually engaged in the work are known as predatory animal and rodent inspectors. The headquarters of the inspectors is in Albuquerque, with Charles F. Bliss, an expert on the animals and their habits, in charge.

There are seven or eight trained hunters in the field all the time. Theirs is a lonely life, for they camp in the mountains or anywhere the pests may be roaming and killing stock. The cowboys help them by giving tips on where they saw signs of the animals. The hunters only come to civilization for supplies for themselves or their horses, but they are required to keep a diary of their daily operations and results, and report regularly. Their camp is always in the open country. These hunters are paid from \$100 to \$150 a month, and they must provide their own sustenance. The furs of the animals they trap or shoot are turned over to the

government, which sells them at the best market price, the proceeds going into the Treasury Department toward the upkeep of biological survey. The hunter gets no part of this money, his salary being his only remuneration. Some of the hunters came out here as health seekers and took up the study of predatory animals, and under government training, are now considered experts. In fact, some of them are said to be more proficient than the old and professional trappers.

Predatory animal extermination is now on a scientific basis. The old method was to trap coyotes and wolves, but poison has been found more effective. Old wolves are trap-wise; in fact, they are educated, and

"As to that," replied an official at the headquarters, "we know that poison killed 3,000 last year, and we figured that this was 75 per cent of the number killed by that method. Of course, the large number trapped or killed by forest rangers, stockmen and individual hunters should be added to the total number exterminated."

The official was asked about the destructive instincts of the mountain lion.

"The lion is the worst enemy of deer in the state," he said. "This beast kills many deer and delights in slaying fawn. Sheep, too, are his prey. Not long ago one of them went through a herd of sheep and killed 30 just for the joy of killing. There are not so many in the state, but they are difficult to get. However, we have met with gratifying results in our war on them."

"Now, as to wolves. Less than four years ago there were 300 wolves in the state, all preying on stock. Today there are only 25, but we are finding it difficult to wipe them out, because they are cunning old fellows, the granddaddys of the cubs that weren't so hard to exterminate."

Wolves from old Mexico are crossing the border into New Mexico, and this gives the inspectors a new problem. There was a drought on the border during the past year, and all the cattle were moved away, depriving the wolves of their food supply of calves. Well, when the cattle were moved the wolves began coming over into New Mexico for their food. One hunter is getting on an average of two wolves a month.

It is estimated that one wolf will do not less than \$1,500 damage a year to cattle at the present price of a steer—about \$30—so if these beasts are allowed to multiply it is easy to understand the potential damage to stock.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the Federal authorities and the people of this state have a war of considerable proportions on their hands. They insist the lion, the bob cat, the wolf and the coyote must go. It isn't only the stockmen who seek the extermination of these animals. They are destroyers of game, and this angle of the situation came up at the last annual meeting of the American Game Protective Association in New York in April. An appeal was made to help in the fight against the predatory animals, and it is meeting with a hearty response from sportsmen. At this meeting it was pointed out that mountain lions in New Mexico killed 3,000 deer in the state the previous year, while hunters killed only 700. Attention was called to the fact that at this rate of slaughter on the part of lions, deer soon would be extinct in the state. Mountain sheep also are being destroyed by the predatory animals.

Grizzly bears are considered predatory, too, especially when their natural food supply—berries, roots, and so on—is cut off, and then they prey on stock and small game.

Gophers, prairie dogs and jack rabbits are classed as rodents by the biological survey, and they are receiving attention from the inspectors. The gopher and prairie dog are not only pests on the ranges, but do damage elsewhere. For instance, it is estimated that gophers damage irrigation ditches supplied by water from the Elephant Butte Dam in the Rio Grande \$60,000 a year. Before the water is let into the ditches the gophers burrow through the sides of the banks, and when the flow comes in the water pours through their holes, flooding alfalfa fields and other growing crops. Ditch riders are employed to discover these holes, and it takes time and money to plug them up. They also can render entire ranges useless by burrowing beneath the grass. Thousands and thousands of acres can be damaged in this way.

And the gophers come to the very gates of the modern city of Albuquerque to carry on their destructive work. If they get into a householder's garden patch he has a difficult job to get rid of them.

While the visitor was in headquarters a request came in from the University of New Mexico, situated at the edge of Albuquerque, to send some one up to rid the grounds of gophers. The little animals got into the grounds and were ruining the lawns.

The East may have its troubles, but any New Mexican stockman will say they are nothing compared to his, with cattle at their present low price and preying wild beasts trying to kill them off even at that.



Above—A trapper and his catch, a grizzly bear, called a predatory animal in New Mexico, because it kills stock and game. There has been constant warfare between the ranchers and the wily animals of the plains, and now Uncle Sam has taken a hand. His enlistment in the fight promises to curb the activity of the stock-killing animals.  
Below—Spotted deer, which mountain lions in New Mexico are killing in large numbers.

they are hard to get through that method. For instance, if a hunter hits a wolf trail and sets out four or five traps, he may get a couple, but others will come along, see the victims in the traps, spot the empty traps and shy away. That is education for them. Besides, some of the old grandfather wolves have been trapped before and freed themselves, which was still more education.

Coyotes like fat more than anything else, and that is what is used. The hunters set out a pre-bait, that is, pieces of fat pork, near a carcass. If coyotes are around, the scent reaches them and they come for the fat. The hunters are thus apprised of their presence. Then they put strychnine in little squares of fat pork, and when the coyotes come back for more food, they eat the pork and the poison. Care is used not to make the poison too strong, for the animals won't eat the meat if they taste the poison.

The visitor mentioned that he had been informed that there was no way of telling how many coyotes were killed by the poison, as they wander away and die and nobody ever sees their bodies.